
OLIVER S. CHAPMAN.

OLIVER SMITH CHAPMAN.

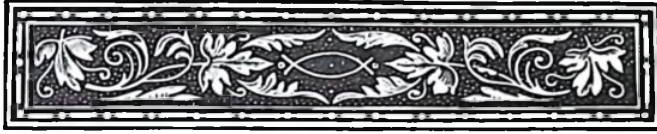
BORN AUGUST 18, 1811.

DIED FEBRUARY 8, 1877.

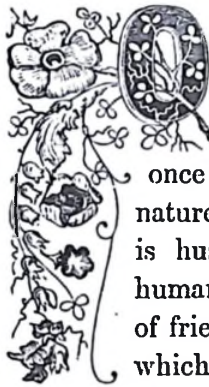
PRIVATELY PRINTED.

1877.





MEMOIR.



ON Sunday the 11th of February all that was mortal of Oliver S. Chapman was deposited by tender hands within the silent grave. A face once radiant with happiness and good-nature is cold and still in death. A voice is hushed that was bold in the cause of humanity and right, yet gentle in the circle of friends and family. A tongue is silenced which was ever ready with kind words, in time of trouble, to sympathize with and soothe the sorrows of others. A hand lies nerveless that was ever at the command of friends and neighbors, townspeople and acquaintances, to assist, to strengthen, and to uphold. A brain has ceased from its mysterious toil which was incessantly meditating the welfare of the great family of man. "The silver cord is loosed, the golden bowl is broken, man goeth to his

long home, and the mourners go about the streets." When such men die in our town, a fragrance passes out of the air; our streets seem emptier as we pass through them; life seems less valuable; a pall of gloom rests over the brightness of mortality, and we are again reminded of the conquest of death over the strongest defences of humanity.

But the lesson of such a life as his should be deeply written on our hearts. Let us be thankful and proud in the consciousness that there is goodness and honesty in the world,—goodness without ostentation, and honesty without cant. These were the distinguishing characteristics of Mr. Chapman's life. Possessed of ample means, he made no display. He never sought official position, but when public honors were bestowed upon him, he bore them meekly, ever remembering that it was a trust he received from his constituents, and not an occasion to display himself. During the thirty years of his residence among us he has been ever active in all measures pertaining to the improvement and embellishment of the town. He was more than a good citizen; he was an active and energetic public man, always ready to give more than his share of time and money to benefit his townspeople. He was ready to serve on any committee where the public welfare was concerned. If a school-house were to be built, there was no one so well qualified to superintend

its erection as Mr. Chapman. Day by day he was at his post, directing, guiding, and taking a part himself if the work flagged. During the dark days of the war he sustained the government, and by his influence induced others to do so who were disposed to be lukewarm. He was to be seen at all public meetings, and though it was seldom that he spoke, he was ever ready to contribute his time and his money to encourage those who were less sanguine than himself. No one watched the course of events during those gloomy years with more interest than he, and no one was more pleased and gratified at the final result.

To him the town's cemetery owes much of its beauty. Here, month after month, he labored, directing the expenditure of the town's money, and when that was insufficient, freely drew from his own purse the necessary funds. But this last year was indeed the crown and glory of his well-spent life, and the remembrance will be long treasured by those who have the welfare of our old town at heart. How much he has done, how faithfully he has labored! The widening of Washington Street was a measure which he heartily approved. He desired to see a wide and level thoroughfare through the principal portion of our town, in place of the narrow and tortuous lane which once disfigured it, and to this end he bent his energies, never shirking any responsibility,

and never hesitating to do what he deemed to be right, regardless of what other men might say.

He became interested in the movement of the citizens for erecting a memorial to General Richard Gridley. As the design took form, he attended the meetings held by the subscribers, and served as a member of the committee for erecting the monument. The site where the monument stands was chosen because Mr. Chapman selected it. The monument was placed in position under his direction, the grounds laid out and ornamented by him, and at the opening of spring it was his intention to further beautify and adorn the last resting-place of our Revolutionary hero.

Into this last year of his life entered another work,—the erecting of a building where the young people can receive instruction, and have rational amusement under the auspices of a religious society. He entered into this matter with enthusiasm, and while the Parish Hall was in course of building, he had a general oversight of all matters pertaining to it; and when it was completed no one enjoyed it more than he, and to no one are the young people more indebted for their increased opportunities for knowledge, the cultivation of the social element in their natures, and their amusements, than to Oliver S. Chapman.

What he was in the bosom of his family, in the

cherished and sacred asylum of his domestic circle, none but themselves can truly tell. We may not intrude within this sanctuary. That he was a kind husband, a loving father, a dutiful son, and a tender brother, all who knew his home and heart life will readily attest. His place can never be filled in the home circle. But in the public weal may we not hope that others, seeing how blessed is his memory, may strive to imitate his virtues in his simple, unostentatious way.

“His life was private; safely led, aloof
From the loud world, which yet he understood,
Largely and wisely, as no worldling could.
For he by privilege of his nature proof
Against false glitter, from beneath the roof
Of privacy, as from a cave, surveyed
With steadfast eye its flickering light and shade,
And gently judged for evil and for good.
But while he mixed not for his own behoof
In public strife, his spirit glowed with zeal,
Not shorn of action, for the public weal,
For truth and justice as its warp and woof,
For freedom as its signature and seal.”

Oliver Smith Chapman was without doubt descended from Ralph Chapman, born in England in 1615, and who at the age of twenty years, being then a resident of the Parish of St. Saviors, Southwark, County Surrey, emigrated to America, as will appear upon consulting the list of passengers who passed from the port of London for

the year ending at Christmas, 1635. Upon his arrival in this country he probably settled at Duxbury, although no mention is made of him until 1640. Ten years afterward he became a resident of Marshfield, and lived there until the time of his death, which occurred in 1671. He had a daughter Mary, who married, in 1666, William Troop. This name, though variously spelled, occurs in the family of Oliver S. Chapman many times. His great-grandfather Throop, when he was a boy, he well remembered seeing. This ancestor, at the age of ninety-one, rode on horseback from Reedsboro', Vermont, to Belchertown, in this State, to visit his relatives. *Throop* Chapman had a number of children, among others, *William*, who, in turn, had, among others, *Daniel*, the father of Oliver, who was born December 23, 1782, and died at Canton, April 12, 1867. He married, May 25, 1809, Nancy Smith, who was born in Walpole, Massachusetts, January 9, 1790, and died March 9, 1838. Their eldest son, Oliver, the subject of this memoir, was born at Belchertown, in the county of Hampshire, August 18, 1811.

His early life was passed in his native town, where he learned from his father the trade of a wheelwright, and soon became a skilful mechanic, obtaining that practical information which enabled him in after years to become so successful a man.

Before he arrived at his majority he had erected with his own earnings a saw-mill.

While the Boston and Providence Railroad was in process of construction, Mr. Chapman paid his first visit to Canton, where he was engaged upon a piece of work near the viaduct, and occupied, with his employees, the very house of which he died possessed. It was about this time that his friend and cousin, William Smith Otis, married (June 22, 1835) Elizabeth, the daughter of Deacon Leonard Everett, of this town. Mr. Chapman was present at the ceremony. The happiness of their wedded life was of short duration, for on the 13th of November, 1839, at the early age of twenty-six years, Mr. Otis died at Westfield, having invented and perfected in these short years one of the marvellous mechanical inventions of the age, "The Otis Steam Excavator."

Mr. Otis and Mr. Daniel Carmichael both had contracted to do work on the Providence road; the latter gentleman induced Mr. Chapman to go with him to Worcester, and near that city he was for a time engaged in constructing what is now a portion of the Boston and Albany Railroad. Again a short time in Canton, and then Mr. Chapman went to a place near Greenwich, in Rhode Island, where he took a contract to construct portions of the Providence and Stonington Railroad. In 1836 he went to

Philadelphia, where a ship canal was in process of construction; upon this he labored. Subsequently he was at New Worcester for a short time. During the year 1837 he took contracts on the Eastern Railroad at Chelsea, Lynn, and Salem. It was on the 18th of September this year, that he was married to Miss Olivia, the daughter of Reuben and Chloe Cook. His next employment was upon the Boston and Albany Railroad, in 1839. Here, in connection with Carmichael, Fairbanks, & Otis, he was employed in excavating a most difficult passage through a solid rock, the sides of which, when complete, were sixty feet on the one hand, and eighty on the other. This work, now known as the Summit Cut, was completed in 1841. But his health at this time failed him, and he returned with his wife to his native town, and there remained for two or three years. It was during these years (January 3, 1844) that his wife died. On the 23d of March, 1845, he was married, for the second time, to the widow of Mr. William S. Otis. The following year he placed a steam excavator on the Vermont Central, at Windsor, and was at work at Claremont, New Hampshire, and Burlington, Vermont. About this time he had an interest in the lumber business in Saginaw County, Michigan. The renewal of the patent on the excavator furnished Mr. Chapman for some time with

occupation in building the machines and selling the right to use the same.

In 1845 he came to Canton with the intention of making it his residence, and although he was often absent with his family, he ever considered our town his home. Since that time he was more or less connected with railroads and with railroad men. In 1850, in company with his brother Wellington and Sidney Dillon, he was engaged in a contract on the Marietta and Cincinnati Railroad. He had contracts at Jacksonville, on the New Jersey Central, at Girard (1858) on the Lake Shore, and at Council Bluffs on the Union Pacific. Of the latter corporation he was for some time a director, as also of the Canada Southern Railroad. He was at one time interested in a contract for filling the lands of the Commonwealth on the "Back Bay," in the city of Boston, and possessed large tracts of land in the States of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Iowa. In 1863-4 he was sent as Representative to the State Legislature from the Eleventh Norfolk District. In 1856 Mr. Chapman was chosen one of the Directors of the Neponset National Bank of Canton. The esteem in which he was held by his contemporaries is embodied in the following resolutions.

At a meeting of the Directors of the Neponset National Bank of Canton, held on February 12, 1877, the following resolutions were unanimously adopted:—

"Whereas, by the sudden death of our associate and friend, Mr. OLIVER S. CHAPMAN, this Board has been deprived of one of its most valued members, therefore be it

"Resolved, That we will treasure among our choicest memories the recollections of his sterling and manly virtues. His undeviating integrity, his solid judgment, his thoughtful foresight, his alacrity in forwarding every good work, his devotion to every public duty, and his ability and faithfulness in the discharge thereof, his pure and upright character, and his unvarying kindliness and gentleness of disposition have not only commanded our respect and esteem, but have won for him our affection and love.

"Resolved, That these resolutions be entered upon the records of the Bank, and that a copy attested by the President and Cashier be forwarded to the family of our departed friend."

On Thursday morning, February 8, Mr. Chapman, apparently in his usual health, took the morning train for Boston. Soon after reaching the city he went to the store of J. V. Kettell, for the purpose of having his watch, which had stopped the evening before, attended to. He removed it from the guard, and Mr. Kettell turned to the window to examine it. Mr. Chapman called his attention to some difficulty with the case, and immediately afterward sank upon a chair and fell to the floor. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, life was extinct. Mr. Kettell immediately notified Mr. Frederick Ames, the only person with whom he knew

Mr. Chapman was acquainted, and in a short time sorrowing friends and relatives gathered to the sad scene. The physician who was first summoned pronounced the cause of death to be ossification of the heart, but the coroner, Dr. O. G. Cilley, said that it was apoplexy, caused by the extraordinary exertion of ascending the stairs. The body was taken in charge by an undertaker, and conveyed to his home.

The funeral services took place in Canton on Sunday the 11th. The especial train which left Boston at one o'clock arrived at the old Canton station about half past one. At two o'clock services were held at the late residence of the deceased. The body was then taken in charge by Sidney Dillon, Esq., of New York, Hon. Charles H. French, Hon. Charles Endicott, Joseph W. Wattles, George Edward Downes, Frank M. Ames, Virgil J. Messenger, and Corydon Spalding, — friends and neighbors, who acted as pall-bearers on the sad occasion, — and was conveyed to the Unitarian Church, where Mr. Chapman had so long worshipped. The church was beautifully decorated with fresh flowers, and filled to its utmost capacity with sorrowing townspeople and distinguished citizens from various parts of the State. The Rev. William H. Savary paid a tribute of respect to the memory of the honest and upright citizen, the kind father, the true friend.

The following extracts are from the discourse of his pastor : —

“ A widely known citizen, a much-loved friend, a public benefactor, has been translated, as it were, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. We are here, from every part of this town and vicinity, to bow down, to pour out our hearts in silent prayer, while we look for the last time upon the changing mortal frame, and pronounce the sad rites of sepulture. We who remain could not have been more unprepared to see what we have seen. The angel came for him at an hour he wot not of, when the pulses were full, when he was rejoicing. Not an interval of an instant divided experiences to him between the rushing tide of time and the silent sea of eternity. He went from earth as swiftly as flies the weaver’s shuttle. We cannot realize it even now.

‘ O, not in cruelty, not in wrath,
The reaper came that day.’

“ But we who remain — family, religious society, town, all whose lines of life touch and cross in and out with his lines — are deeply bowed with loss, and bereaved and startled. This family, round about whom we gather with deep emotion and tender sympathy, had no time between ‘ Good morning ’ and a noon wrapped all about with clouds and thick darkness. He greeted, in ruddy health, his fellow-travellers ; he showed me (as by chance we fell upon each other) the news, in the morning, on that swift train to the city that proved a ‘ very chariot of fire and horses of fire.’ Behold what desolations the Lord hath made in the earth ! The mourners go about the streets. The strong men bow themselves. God took him. What a kind, good man ! what an upright neighbor ! what a helper ! How sincere this mourning is !

This throng comes with one accord into one place. None have come here with unfelt profession of respect or for form. None name him but to testify to his sterling worth.

"In published notices of this man you are informed of known parts of his history, of his self-made, honorable career. Testimonies borne in from all directions give solace and balm that distil comfort above price, that sanctify the outward separation, that administer peace. In thinking of our loss, the impulse is to ask, Why must we part so suddenly with him? Why is not some other less useful and valuable man caught away to taste death for him?

"It is due to the character of these last solemn scenes, in this sorrowing presence, that I hold up the life of this man. No one in our midst has been more trusted and valued by us all. The public heart gives command to me to try to portray (modestly, at least) what he has been to the business sphere, to home, to the church, to the town. Toward his God and toward his fellow-man he has left a clear witness of good. In that which distinguishes the outward life, in business relations, this man belongs to those who cope with great adventures, who dare to take high and responsible parts in practical mechanic arts. He early rises to be a master builder and contractor. Ability large enough is given to him to make him a constructor in that which marks off our modern age. His administrative and executive talent finds itself equal to the necessity of the time which builds highways that even span a continent. The steam-carriage, as a masterly invention, calls out no greater wonder than the daring skill which gives to it the safe bed. The builders of railroad levels and tunnels and bridges belong to a rare class of independent,

self-centred persons, who have noticeable capacity in them. Thus I find the strong mind. Our friend's early worldly success is born of real superiority to many fellow-men. Observe, now, that while this man followed exhaustive, absorbing business and toil, an attentiveness to industry, by which, during past years, he won his independence, even better and more precious than all this, he made a true, sweet home. Do we not thank the Great Father above that here, when the spear and the shield are laid down, when the earth fails and the heart is still, that from those nearest to the dead the tears do fall like rain. I know how expressive these blinding tears, of depth upon depth of filial, of brotherly, of sisterly, of neighborly love and gratitude. Toward family he fulfilled no duty that was not his joy and crown of existence. He exemplified daily constancy, purity, unbounded domestic devotion, attachment, and care. And when through these closing years he might have given himself to worldliness, might have gratified only the senses, he lived in such modesty that it became a life-study how to put behind him ostentation and display.

"Sad is it to feel that we who have been associated with him in this well-loved church can have his large and immediate help no more. We entertain an unmeasured loss. He has never been more clearly and unreservedly identified with this congregation than during the last year. In an enterprise that seemed to promise means to connect the church more immediately with the world about us—the enterprise that has now taken outward existence and proved to be greatly helpful—he who did the most with personal service, with time and inspection, lies here lifeless, as to the

form, never to speak to us as earthly associate. One week ago he engaged in the accustomed services of worship; he had the appearance of full vigor. Truly, we are taught to make no boast of to-morrow. In the issue of a day we are taught that even the strongest have no assurance except of the hope of immortality.

"The attendance upon these last rites of large numbers of the citizens makes vivid the great loss to this town and business vicinity. No one, more variously serviceable and useful could be taken. There is not a public measure or work of improvement during twenty years on which we may not see the seal of his faithful care. Counsellor, judge, adviser, benefactor continuously, whether looking toward morals, education, or public works, his fellow-men gave him trusts and he most admirably met them.

"And we go forth from this house of worship to-day, even to lay his body where his work, his adornment, his labors, are to be conspicuously seen on every side. Beauty that has been year by year added to this cemetery, the increased area and changes of these later months, we owe, as citizens, also to his wise oversight and management.

"On the monument of Sir Christopher Wren, the architect of St. Paul's, in London, is the inscription (most familiar, doubtless, to you) in these words, fitly applicable to our now departed friend: 'If you seek his monument, look around you.' His works on either side of this church make the kind of memorial most suitable to the quiet ways of the man. He impressed you every day that he cared very little for outward show, or the publications agreeable to worldly pride. Simplicity in abundance, equality with others, was the manner of his earthly living; even as when we go down

to the grave the hand of death destroys all pride of title, distinctions, and preferments.

"O, how he, being dead, speaks to us who survive! Moral excellence, wherever we find it, is indeed the pearl of great price. What glorifies death and sorrow? What lends thoughts this solemn moment to console and heal so much as this? Most potent to assuage earth's losses and woes is that which drops down into our hearts out of the testimonies to the truth, the integrity, the good deeds, the righteous life of the departed. It is not so much a calamity even to fall by the way, or to be summoned instantaneously out of time into eternity, as not to leave to the earth and to children a spotless name.

'Life's more than breath and the quick round of blood;
It is a great spirit, and a busy heart.
The coward and the small in soul scarce do live.
One generous feeling, one great thought, one deed
Of good, ere night, would make life longer seem
Than if each year might number a thousand days,
Spent as is this by nations of mankind.'"

At the conclusion of the address the hymn

"O spirit freed from earth,
Rejoice, thy work is done!
The weary world's beneath thy feet,
Thou brighter than the sun!"

was sung by the choir; and then all that was mortal of Oliver S. Chapman was deposited in the cemetery he loved so well.

The following article from the pen of a friend and neighbor of Mr. Chapman appeared in the "Norfolk County Gazette," of February 10.

"No public improvement has been made in this town since Mr. Chapman became a citizen which has not been helped, if it did not originate with him. His mind seemed to be constantly on the watch to find some way of doing something for the public good. And he was as ready to help and to relieve all who were suffering, personally and privately, or who were afflicted in mind, body, or estate. And he was not alone willing to do good on his own motion, but he was ready to join with others in any and all plans for beneficence. His life was a daily lesson of sound morality. What a foe he was to every form of vice! How his face was set as a flint against the use of intoxicating drinks! How ready he was to befriend the tempted and erring and to raise up the fallen! How he brought the young men to respect him, to love him, and to follow him! And he was a model in industry, enterprise, promptitude, modesty, sobriety, honesty, patience, integrity, worthy of all imitation.

"When one considers how sudden was his decease, how this our fellow-citizen was cut down in the full vigor of his intellect, in the unimpaired strength of his manhood, while on his form or features the most jealous eyes of watchful friends had observed no approach of age, no symptoms of infirmity or of decay; whose eye was as sparkling, whose smile was as bright, whose cheeks were as ruddy as in the fair flush of youth, whose steps were as elastic, whose spirits seemed as buoyant as ever they had been known, one can but stand still, aghast at the suddenness and terrible certainty of death. Not that death is terrible or to be feared by one who has an abiding faith and serene trust in the promises of the Saviour, but that the suddenness of the summons shocks us."





In Memory.

OLIVER SMITH CHAPMAN.

Died suddenly, February 8, 1877.



THE congregation now assembled within these walls, holding in most grateful memory one whose name seems to be written all through the spaces above and beneath, desire to offer heartfelt testimonials and resolutions.

Our late benefactor and friend enjoyed this hall, and shared our pride in its completion. With us a few months ago, when we dedicated the rooms to Christian fellowship, to mutual good-will, to social enjoyment, no face was more glowing. He saw and promoted every step, from first to last, connected with the determination to erect on this spot this convenient parish home.

He was a man fitted by nature for deeds of amity and sympathy. In the ripe time of action it was the good fortune of those most largely influential to obtain him for the chairman of their Building Committee. How well he executed, to him and to us, this most interesting work, is confessed on all sides and acknowledged day by day. The

extension, by purchase of the church grounds and land, the contracts with the laborers and masons who excavated and laid the corners, he personally authorized and superintended. And day after day, as the work went honestly forward, he spared no pains to watch each detail and even to lend a hand. How vividly this building brings him now to our minds and our recollections!

Rejoicing in usual health, he whose presence we now mourn spent the hours of the last evening permitted to him in the outward visible form here, where we this moment engage in hymn and prayer and meditation. It is good for us to pause a moment; it is good for us to be here to-night with tender tributes. Let us arrest for a few moments the course of our exercises, with the sense of the recent loss to the town and parish and church. We will stand while the Resolutions are being read.

Resolved, That all who meet in this place, and find here a means of rational enjoyment, Christian fellowship, and social improvement, owe a debt of constant gratitude and remembrance to Oliver Smith Chapman.

Resolved, That the practical energy, thoroughness, co-operation, and personal services of our recently deceased benefactor, leave mementos and memorials of him in every part.

Resolved, That this town has lost one of its ablest and most trusted citizens; this parish and society, one of its pillars of strength; all with whom he was connected in ties of friendship and love, "one whose heart was like a staff" for theirs "to lean and rest upon," —

"The strongest in the longest day,
With steadfast love."

Resolved, That some suitable portrait of the features of our friend, to be placed here, would be most cherished, and form a

grateful reminder of what this place owes to his interest and his deeds.

Read and adopted in the Unitarian Parish Hall, Sunday evening, February 25, 1877.

The following is a list of Mr. Chapman's children:—

OLIVIA COOK, born at Canton, Feb. 28, 1846. Married William Abrams French of Boston, Oct. 1, 1868.

MARY ELIZABETH, born at Claremont, N. H., Dec. 4, 1847. Married to George Munroe Endicott, Oct. 8, 1867.

WILLIAM OTIS, born at Canton, Nov. 23, 1849. Married Ella Frances Wattles, Aug. 28, 1872. She died Nov. 1, 1873.

OLIVER EVERETT, born at Canton, Dec. 29, 1851.

GEORGE HENRY, born Oct. 18, 1853; died May 23, 1857.

JAMES EDGAR, born Oct. 28, 1855; died Mar. 23, 1856.

ALMIRA KIMBALL, born May 6, 1857.

GEORGE FREDERIC, born Sept. 14, 1860.

JAMES EDWIN, born July 4, 1862.

